Dear Friends,

School may be out for the summer, but that doesn’t mean we at the CHA – or our residents – are showing any signs of slowing down.

We’ve launched our Summer Youth Employment Program offering students opportunities to work, learn, create, and develop skills at non-profits, universities, and in government. We continue to celebrate seniors with exciting events, including summer festivals and visits to cultural sites across the city. Major progress continues on new and improved housing options for families and individuals on the South and West sides, among many other communities across the city.

We kicked off National Homeownership Month in June by celebrating with a new homeowner in the South Chicago community while highlighting the success of CHA’s Choose to Own program which in 15 years has helped more than 600 CHA residents become homeowners.

Over the last few months, we’ve set new benchmarks for housing and community development, recently being recognized at the 25th Annual CNDA Awards as well as in a special report about the promises and pitfalls of building partnerships between public housing authorities and postsecondary educational institutions. And our partnership with Chicago Public Library that produced three innovative co-located housing and library developments was recognized with a national award.

We were proud to celebrate the opening of two of those unique developments in the West Ridge community at Northtown Apartments and Northtown Branch Library, and the Taylor Street Apartments and Little Italy Branch Library on the city’s Near West Side, where affordable apartments are built above new Chicago Public Library branches.

In Bronzeville, we continue to work with residents and local partners to push the envelope on energy, installing new solar technology for a microgrid to help residents independently manage their supply of power and electricity.

Always looking forward, the CHA remains committed to cultivating the next generation of city leaders and dedicated residents—whether it’s facilitating long-term Big Brothers Big Sisters mentorships between civic leaders and local students, or sponsoring promising young women filmmakers through a partnership with DePaul University – a group whose films were recently included at the illustrious Cannes Film Festival.

With your support, we will continue to make great strides for Chicago, finding unique ways to build lasting partnerships and effectively deliver the services and resources our residents need. This summer, that includes support for the Our City. Our Safety. initiative, a citywide effort that has community partners and neighborhoods coming together to SAY NO TO VIOLENCE. Please join me in pledging your support to keep our communities safe.

Here’s to a safe and productive summer!

Eugene E. Jones, Jr.
Chief Executive Officer
CHA Student Films Land at Cannes Film Festival

Perhaps the highest aspiration of any budding filmmaker is to have their work screened on the world stage at the Cannes Film Festival. For a group of local high school girls, that aspiration has become a reality, as three of their projects – “Birthday,” “Phenomenally Me” and “Without Dying” – were included in the film library at the prestigious film festival in May.

The young filmmakers' projects were the products of a six-week course co-sponsored by the Chicago Housing Authority in which female students from Chicago high schools learn the craft of filmmaking from graduate students and faculty of DePaul University.

CHA students and residents have important, necessary stories to tell, but lack access to the filmmaking resources and equipment that bring such stories to the big screen. That was the motivation behind the CHA’s collaboration with DePaul University’s School of Cinematic Arts and an important catalyst for the students who participated.

“Being part of an African-American community with stories not being shared that should be acknowledged,” said Zana Carter, who joined the ranks of the young filmmakers. “Those things drove me into filmmaking.” Carter, who created a documentary about bullying titled “What If I Told You,” is now a junior at DePaul studying filmmaking and cinematography.

“I’m so thrilled when I get calls and emails years later from past participants telling me about a script they wrote, asking for a letter of recommendation to film school, or inquiring about film projects or directors they can shadow,” said Liliane Calfee, program director and faculty member at DePaul’s School of Cinematic Arts. “If we want more diversity in the media industry, we need to be deliberate about how we create more access. Our program does just that.”

Each year the DePaul Documentary Filmmaking Program for Girls selects 12-16 African-American high school students who live in public housing across Chicago and pairs them with DePaul teachers and advisers. It supplies each student with an hourly wage over six weeks in which the student filmmakers craft, shoot, and complete a short documentary on a topic of their choosing. This year’s themes included a celebration of self-expression through hair, a positive perspective on Chicago’s South Side, and humanizing the approach to drug addiction and homelessness.

Now that the films have landed at Cannes, they are part of a “curated catalog viewed by film industry experts from around the world, putting our young filmmakers’ work on a global stage,” said CHA CEO Eugene Jones, Jr. “This is an example of how CHA’s unique partnerships and programming for young people are making a big impact while providing opportunities that engage youth in positive endeavors that have the potential to change their lives.”

The program would also not be possible without the generous and enduring support of writer and film advocate Chaz Ebert, who hosts a premiere night for the films and works to create post-program career opportunities for the students. “The girls in the DePaul/CHA program have voices and viewpoints that you don’t see or hear a lot of in the larger film community,” said Ebert in a recent Variety article. “I think these are voices that are very important.”

Chicago Program Gives High School Girls Lessons in Documentary Filmmaking
Tom McClean | Variety
The CHA’s “co-located” housing and Chicago Public Library branch developments in the Irving Park community, West Ridge community and Little Italy community were spotlighted as architectural benchmarks of public housing and urban development in a critique by the New York Times’ renowned architecture critic Michael Kimmelman.

In his May profile, “Chicago Finds a Way to Improve Public Housing: Libraries” Kimmelman asks: “Is any city doing public housing right these days?” By combining public housing and local libraries, Chicago provided an answer. It was “just plain good urban planning,” said Kimmelman. “For longtime neighborhood residents and tenants of the new housing projects, the branches at the same time provide common ground in a city siloed by race and class.”

Last month, former Mayor Rahm Emanuel joined CHA CEO Eugene E. Jones Jr. alongside development partners and members of the West Ridge community to cut the ribbon on the new Northtown Apartments, one of the three affordable housing developments “co-located” within Chicago Public Library (CPL) branches. This development breaks new ground by pairing affordable and accessible housing options with an important public good: libraries.

Developed by Evergreen Real Estate Group and designed by Perkins+Will, the Northtown Apartments development, as Kimmelman described it, is “meant to be, and is, a beacon and an eye-catcher.”

The Northtown Apartments offer 44 apartments for seniors aged 62 and older with 30 units for renters from the CHA waiting list and 14 affordable units. It also boasts a fitness center, laundry room, outdoor space, as well as easy access to the library community room to use for meetings or other resident activities.

CHA CEO Eugene E. Jones, Jr. called the Northtown development a “community anchor,” one that “combines new housing options and a library that will serve residents of all ages from West Ridge.” Jones added: “Our goal is to expand affordable housing opportunities across Chicago while also delivering community assets that can benefit all residents.”

Chicago Finds a Way to Improve Public Housing: Libraries
Michael Kimmelman | New York Times
CHA is proud that Taylor Street Apartments and Little Italy Branch Library development has been honored as Project of the Year by Smart Growth America/LOCUS Leadership Awards.

The award was announced on June 23 at the Smart Growth America LOCUS Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C., giving this innovative development and partnership a well-deserved national spotlight.

CEO Eugene E. Jones, Jr. said of the award: “It recognizes not only this innovative building and development but CHA’s partnership with Chicago Public Library. We knew when we embarked on this unique project and partnership that we were building more than a new building – we were creating a community anchor and asset that will have a lasting impact on residents and this Near West Side neighborhood.”

Read the press release announcing the award.
On June 10, CHA joined new homeowner Niesha Chism to mark National Homeownership Month and celebrate Chism’s recent purchase of her South Chicago home through the CHA’s Choose to Own (CTO) program.

Chism, the mother of three, is one of more than 600 residents who have purchased a house through the 15-year-old CTO program, which allows participants to use a housing subsidy toward their mortgage payment. For Chism, it was a sweet homecoming: She was able to buy the house next door to her childhood home where her parents still live.

“It was a huge deal,” said Chism, an IT Project Analyst for Metra. “Homeownership was something that had been on my mind for the last couple of years. So, I was excited. I looked at my kids and cried because I was able to give them something steady, something we could call home.”

The 17-year-old CTO program allows qualified public housing families or those participating in the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program to use a portion of their rent payments to accumulate equity and offset a portion of their mortgage – the same way a voucher is used to offset a portion of rent.

Through a variety of community partnerships, participants are provided a comprehensive support network that includes financial assistance, homebuyer education, credit counseling and other services that help the families navigate the process and increase their chances of success as a homeowner.

Chism received homebuyer counseling from NHS; legal representation from the LUCHA and financing from Wintrust Mortgage. She qualified for down payment and closing costs from the Illinois Housing Development Authority and Lift Funds.

CEO Eugene E. Jones, Jr. said that the success of homebuyers like Ms. Chism “would not be possible without the support of our partners like Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago (NHS) and LUCHA, who work tirelessly to help Chicagoans reach their goals and fulfill their dreams of homeownership.”

Read more in the Chicago Sun-Times
In collaboration with the Council of Large Public Housing Authorities (CLPHA), the Kresge Foundation recently issued a major report on the expanding crisis of student homelessness on campuses across the U.S. In that report, the CHA was lauded for its innovative efforts to pursue collaboration with postsecondary institutions to promote college access, retention, and graduation rates for public housing residents.

The CLPHA’s “Eliminating Barriers to Postsecondary Success” details the most significant hurdles to building and maintain partnerships between public housing authorities (PHAs) and community colleges across the country, as well as the advantages and shortcoming of local, state, and federal policies aimed at supporting postsecondary achievement for students served by PHAs.

The report included a number of PHAs struggling to address the rampant issue of student homelessness and housing and food insecurity, but noted the Chicago Housing Authority as a leader and one of five outstanding models for other agencies, cities and states to emulate.

"The Chicago Housing Authority is proud to support thousands of residents through CHA scholarships and the Partners in Education program with City Colleges of Chicago,” said Cassie Brooks, assistant director of education for CHA. “In pairing grant aid with individual counseling, we continue toward the goals of increased academic achievement and, ultimately, self-sufficiency. We thank the Kresge Foundation and CLPHA for collaborating with public housing agencies, highlighting resident successes and bringing resident post-secondary programs to the forefront.”

Council of Large Public Housing Authorities, “Eliminating Barriers to Postsecondary Success"

Click here to read the CLPHA press release about the report
CHA Board Takes Major Steps in Three Important Developments

Redevelopment of Historic LeClaire Courts Moves Forward with Selection of Development Teams
On Chicago’s Southwest side, plans for a newly reimagined LeClaire Courts are moving ahead with the selection of a new development team. LeClaire Partners, LLC, comprised of Cabrera Capital and The Habitat Company, will oversee the redevelopment of the 40-acre site. The project will seek to develop new housing and retail components that will bolster and reinvigorate the Cicero corridor. The development team will work with local community groups, the City, State, and other local partners to appropriately guide the planning and implementation of the redevelopment.

Renovated Senior Housing in Wicker Park
There is welcome news for residents in the Wicker Park community, as the CHA Board of Commissioners confirmed selection of the redevelopment team of Pennrose-Bickerdike to work with CHA in a joint venture that will include the rehabilitation of Wicker Park Apartments and Annex Senior Buildings, two CHA-owned apartment buildings that serve more than 200 low-income seniors. Also planned is new mixed-income family housing on the site, supporting CHA’s commitment to expanding affordable housing options on the North Side of the city.

New Affordable Housing in West Town & Humboldt Park
The CHA also plans to deliver new affordable rental housing in the West Town and Humboldt Park communities, with the Board approving 31 new units supported by CHA project-based vouchers (PBVs) in Pierce House, a mixed-use building at 3527 W. North Avenue in the Humboldt Park community, as well as for the Paseo Boricua Arts Building at 2709-2715 W. Division Street in the West Town community. Owned and operated by La Casa Norte, a non-profit social service agency dedicated to supporting homeless youth, Pierce House will feature office space, medical offices, community space, and a teaching kitchen. Paseo Boricua Arts Building, boasting 2,780 square feet of commercial, artist, and community space, as well as a gallery space on each residential floor, will include 24 affordable units with six PBV units for renters from the CHA waiting list. Brinshore will serve as its developer.

Click here to read the CHA press release
For more than a decade, the Aronson Furniture building at 4630 S. Ashland has remained a boarded-up storefront on an otherwise busy commercial strip in the Back of the Yards community. Plans were unveiled recently that will bring a new mixed-use, mixed-income development that will feature not only affordable and market-rate one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, but space for performing arts and retail as well to the site.

“Our goal at CHA is to bring new housing opportunities to as many Chicago neighborhoods as we can,” said CHA CEO Eugene E. Jones, Jr. “As we’ve done with other developments, this will also allow us to create a new community asset that will serve not only the building’s residents but the larger community as well. Projects like these are what help build and sustain strong, vibrant communities.”

Currently in the planning and design stage, the new development is expected to bring 80 new residential rental units to the Back of the Yards community, many which will be reserved for families on the CHA housing waiting list, and will be supported by a combination of public funding sources.

Partnering with Chicago-based VLV Development, CHA has helped bring rooftop solar power technology to the Dearborn Homes, a public housing development that serves more than 600 families in the Bronzeville community.

This most recent solar installation is part of ComEd’s Bronzeville Community microgrid, an ongoing project to build out a small power grid capable of generating power for the nearby community to support critical public services amid interruptions on the main grid. The installation will help maintain electricity for the property’s 17 buildings, including 660 residential units.

“This innovative partnership places CHA at the forefront of the clean energy industry,” said CHA CEO Eugene E. Jones, Jr. “We are glad to take these steps to ensure energy efficiency and better outcomes for our communities.”

The initial phase of solar installations of this sort can be cost-prohibitive. Fortunately, via incentives provided by the 2017 Future Energy Jobs Acts (FEJA), a portion of the upfront costs have been dramatically reduced. ComEd received a $4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy.

In Bronzeville, residents are a vocal and visible part of ComEd’s efforts to convert conventional power sources to the solar microgrid, as well as ready partners for new ventures in the community, including technology pilots for an electric vehicle transportation service, off-grid wind and solar LED streetlights, public Wi-Fi, and outdoor interactive displays of community news and emergency alerts.
Four developments supported by the CHA were recognized as outstanding affordable housing projects at this year’s Chicago Neighborhood Development Awards (CNDA) – an annual ceremony that recognizes and honors the best community development projects in Chicago and the community organizations behind them.

The CHA-supported award-winning projects included:
- City Gardens and the Carling Hotel, whose architects Landon Bone Baker received a first-place tie for the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Award for Architectural Excellence in Community Design
- St. Edmund’s Oasis which won third place in the same category for Johnson & Lee Architects
- IFF Access Housing, which won the Polk Pros. Foundation Affordable Rental Housing Preservation Award

Each of these developments was honored with CNDA awards for their commitment to providing access to affordable housing options for families and individuals without sacrificing sound design, attractive contemporary aesthetics, and, importantly, the historical legacy of those communities – a vision for affordable urban housing championed by the CHA under the leadership of CEO Eugene Jones.

“We are extremely proud of these awards, and I’d like to thank LISC Chicago and the CNDA judges for recognizing our work,” said CHA CEO Eugene E. Jones Jr. “I would also like to thank the CHA team and all of our partners on these projects for a job well done, as we continue to provide better housing opportunities that support the long-term success of our residents and the communities of Chicago.”

[Click here to read the press release about the award-winning developments]
In 2016, the CHA became the first City of Chicago government agency to partner with the Big Brothers Big Sisters Workplace Mentoring Program. Since then, as scores of CHA employees as well as partners, community members, and local leaders recruited by CHA have served as mentors to students across the city, building one-to-one relationships and providing opportunities for Chicago’s youth to develop self-esteem, new interests, and plan for the future.

That fruitful collaboration saw another success recently as the CHA partnered with Big Brothers Big Sisters Metropolitan Chicago (BBBS) for its second annual “Career Talks” at the Gary Comer Youth Center on Chicago’s South Side.

At the event Comer students were introduced to a wide variety of the city's business and community leaders. These “Career Champions” met with students in small group discussions to offer advice for the future and, more important, inspire and encourage students to aim high.

To mark the conclusion of this year’s BBS program cycle, Comer students and their mentors will attend a Chicago Cubs game courtesy of Julian Green, Vice President of Communications and Community Affairs for the Chicago Cubs.

Click here to read the press release about the event

4TH ANNUAL “SPRINGBOARD TO SUCCESS” FUNDRAISER... A SUCCESS!

On Thursday, May 16th, the CHA joined community leaders, local supporters, and key stakeholders to celebrate and raise funds for the CHA’s Springboard to Success (S2S) initiative. Held at the newly opened event space The Stacks at 190 S. LaSalle, the 4th annual cocktail fundraiser brought together nearly 150 attendees to raise over $100,000 to support S2S sponsored programs and events benefiting CHA youth.

Since its inception, S2S has provided youth currently living in CHA households avenues and resources for achieving housing stability as an adult without a housing subsidy via scholarships, development programs geared toward preparing students for future success in college, as well as access to a network of local non-profit partners that can help launch CHA youth down successful career paths.

This year’s fundraiser was emceed by Former FOX Chicago anchor Robin Robinson, who today is the Director of Community Affairs for the Chicago Police Department. S2S Chairman Ken Malone and Tyreesha Owens, a four-time CHA scholarship recipient and recent graduate of Illinois State University, also delivered remarks.

Click here to view a video about S2S
Every May, CHA marks Older Americans Month with special programming for residents focusing on both education and recreation. This year, activities included a lunch and bingo with students from the University of Chicago Laboratory School, digital training for residents, and a Mother's Day event. Many of the programs took place at CHA senior buildings, but programming also included exciting events off-site for residents.

One such activity was a trip to the National Museum of Mexican Art for residents of the Albany Terrace, Alfreda Barnett Duster, Zelda Ormes, and William Jones properties. The museum outing was planned by the Local Advisory Council’s President of the Central Region, Rosemary Coleman.

In all, around 80 senior CHA residents attended the trip for a guided tour of the museum where they enjoyed photographs, paintings, and sculptures by Mexican and Mexican-American artists on display.

Click here to read the press release about their visit